WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY—Founded December 19, 1857 MARCH 1976

WASHTENAW IMPRESSION

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Frank Wilhelme, executive director of the Historical Society of Michigan, has resigned as a director of the Washtenaw County Historical Society due to increased responsibilities and work load during the Bicentennial Year. We have accepted his resignation with regret and will miss Frank's counsel and expertise on the board. On behalf of the board and membership I wish to express our appreciation for your great contribution to the society, Frank. Thank you.

The terms of four other directors will expire this June 30th. They are: Linda Eberbach, Stuart Thayer, Naomi James and David Osler.

I have recently appointed a Nominating Committee consisting of David Pollock, Rosemary Whelan, Irene Lawless and Dan Lirones to come up with a slate of officers for the July 1, 1976 through June 30, 1977 term and replacements for the above directors for terms of three years. The nominating committee will welcome any suggestions from the membership at large. If you have suggestions, please write any of the above members of the nominating committee or phone the committee chairman, David Pollock, at 971-6847. Election of officers and new directors will be held at the annual meeting, generally held early in June.

Thomas F. Lacy
President

COUNTY HISTORIC DISTRICT PLANS UPDATING PROJECT

Recording county history as seen through the eyes of persons who experienced it is the aim of a bicentennial project of the Washtenaw County Historic District Commission.

The plan is to tape record interviews with a cross section of county residents, both elderly and not so elderly, about their life and the events they witnessed in the county over the years.

The recordings are to be housed at the University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library on North Campus. Eventually transcriptions will be made.

The project was launched at a conference Feb. 19 at Bentley Library. Lydia Muncy, secretary of WCHDC, was chairman. All fifty available places at the conference were taken.

The most recent general county history appeared in 1906, she noted. A great deal has happened since that time, of course, and the aim of the project is to fill in the record with the personal recollections of those who witnessed it.

Mrs. Muncy would appreciate suggestions of persons who should be interviewed. Her telephone is 663-3761.

ALL ABOARD!

"(Railroad Ticket) Agent Sharpless says that by May 1st he will have on sale tickets by 40 different routes to the Centennial at Philadelphia at $26.10 a head."

From "Ann Arbor Courier" weekly issue, March 3, 1876, in Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Library, U-M.

'UP AND DOWN IN DOWNTOWN' WILL BE WYSTAN STEVENS' TOPIC AT MARCH MEETING

"Up and Down in Downtown" will be the topic at the Washtenaw County Historical Society meeting at 8 p.m. Thursday, March 25, in Liberty Hall at Ann Arbor Federal Savings & Loan, Liberty at Division Sts. in Ann Arbor.

Changes in downtown Ann Arbor buildings will be the focus of an illustrated talk by Wystan Stevens, local historian and curator of Kempf House.

He will select slides from his collection, now estimated at 13,000, of buildings which have been destroyed, altered or restored, as well as new buildings in the area to give a picture of the changing face of downtown Ann Arbor.

ZONTA OFFERS DONATIONS IN TURN FOR SALE HELP

Zonta Club has offered two types of contributions to WCHS in turn for a little reciprocal help.

Zonta will donate to WCHS at the rate of $2.20 per hour for every hour WCHS volunteers help with the annual Zonta rummage sale Thursday to Saturday, March 25-27.

They have also offered the books left over from their sale to the Society. The Board has accepted the offer and plans a book sale later, either alone or with the Kathering Groomes Memorial Plant Sale next fall.

Both men and women volunteers are needed for the Zonta sale. If you can help please telephone Hazel Proctor, 769-8300, or Wilma Steketee, 764-0446.

OLD COINS, ART, HAIR YIELD SECRETS

Where did the Hopewell Indians in Michigan 2,000 years ago get spearheads of rare obsidian?

Are those 1,500 year old Persian coins in the British Museum really authentic or modern fakes?

What can a 100-year-old hair wreath tell us about pollution?

Those are questions Prof. Adon A. Gordus, U-M professor of chemistry, dealt with in his slide-illustrated talk at the WCHS February meeting.

Using a nuclear reactor and a method called neutron activation analysis he can shed considerable light on the authenticity of coins, other metal art objects, paintings and the amount of mercury, lead and other trace elements in human hair.

Dr. Gordus got started on such radioactive analysis when Prof. James B. Griffin, curator of archeology of the University Museums, asked Prof. Leigh Anderson in chemistry "Who does radioactivity?" Prof. Anderson referred him to Gordus. (Prof. Anderson, now retired, is a WCHS member. Prof. Griffin recently retired.)

Prof. Griffin was trying to determine trade routes among Hopewell Indians whose mounds have been found in Michigan, Ohio, and Illinois. Glassy, black obsidian spearheads had been found in the mounds. They must have come from a distance because there are only a few sources in the world, none local.

Dr. Gordus tested the trace element composition of about a dozen sources before he found one that matched perfectly. It was from the obsidian cliff in Yellowstone National Park.

During that research, he discovered there had been an obsidian trade in the Near East 7,000 years ago.

He then got interested in analyzing old coins. He discovered that while the inscriptions might be propaganda, analysis could show if it was a fake of modern silver, whether the mint had cheated on the stated amount and even where it was probably mined.

A modern coin done in the old propaganda style of inscription might say something like "We love Mayor Daley, Windy City, 1968" along with an indication of the denomination or value. The date was often stated as the year in the reign of a certain monarch.

The thing that made Gordus's large scale studies possible is that he has found a method of obtaining a tiny, hardly noticeable sample without removing the items from the museum or collector's home.

In earlier methods of testing all or part of the object might have to be destroyed or marred, or at least removed to the laboratory and subjected to costly procedures with residual radioactivity. (A museum with 1,000 irradiated silver coins would, legally, be required to obtain an Atomic Energy Commission radioisotope-storage license.)

With the method he uses, surface corrosion is stroked off a 3-to-4 millimeters wide area on the edge of a coin, and a metal streak obtained by rubbing with a small piece of roughened quartz tubing.

The samples can then be put in the nuclear reactor and the resulting radioactivity analyzed with a gamma-ray analyzer.

He has analyzed 1,500 Persian coins from the Sasanian period 200 to 650 A. D. as well as many other coins. He traveled to the British museum, as well as museums in Paris and Leningrad to obtain samples. His many little samples which rattled in their plastic cases greatly confused customs agents, he said.

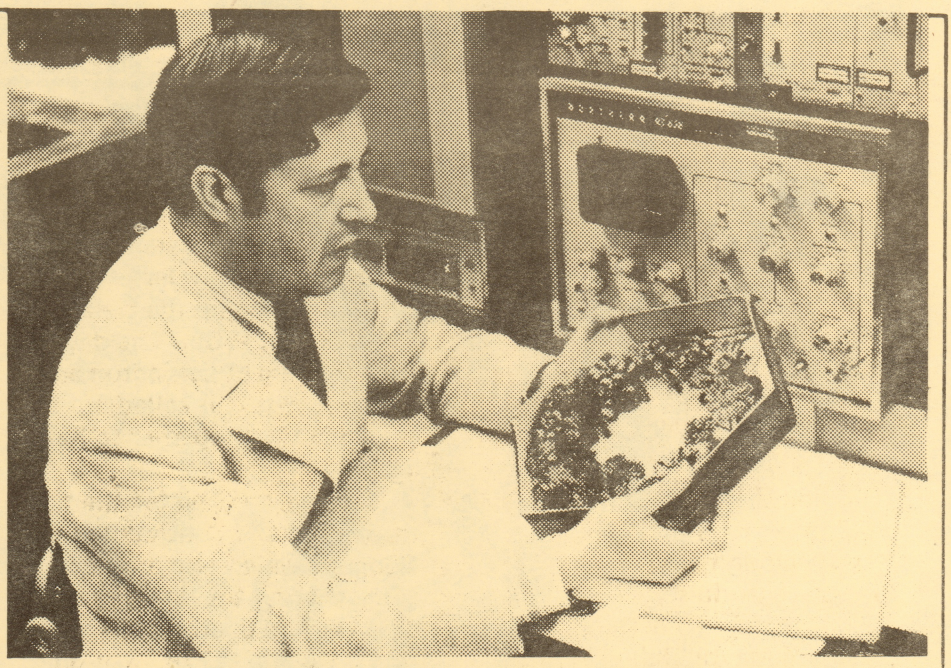
Gold and silver are chemically similar and there is always a little gold impurity in silver ore. The levels of gold impurity in most silver coins minted more than 100 to 200 years ago appears to be an indication of levels occurring in original silver sources, he finds.

Most or all the gold impurity is removed from modern silver so that a modern fake may thus be detected. The level of gold impurity varies with the source so that geographic location of sources can sometimes be determined.

Although the Geological Survey of Iran (Persia) does not list a single source and it is usually stated there never were any, his study suggests there was one in the period of Umayyad coinage around 700 A. D.

He found one counterfeit "silver" coin from the time of Henry III of France which had no silver at all. It was 75 percent copper and 25 percent arsenic. It was thought arsenic was not known until 1620 but apparently the counterfeiters knew about it in 1578.

He has studied other metal art objects and found a few fakes in even the best museums. He predicts that the fakes will remain on display only as long as the curator or buyer of them is around.



Dr. Adon A. Gordus of the U-M chemistry department holds a hair wreath in front of a gamma-ray analyzer he uses to study trace elements in hair samples, other items. The wreath shown is from Kempf House. It was made in Ann Arbor in 1864-66 by Miss Jane O. Wheeler according to an inscription on the back.

There are two grades of fakes, he commented, one for the private collector and one for museums. Somehow the supply (of rare art objects) always seems to equal the demand, he said, so there is increasing suspicion of fakery.

He showed a slide of gold bars supposed to be old and selling for $25,000. He thinks they were new gold made to look old and contained about $300 to $400 worth of gold.

He found that many of the silver coins minted for Zapata forces in the Mexican Revolution of 1914-15 were debased. Most contained less than the proclaimed value of silver and gold and the one peso pieces were especially deficient in the proclaimed added gold content.

But he has found that down through history, coins seldom meet the legal standard of weight and silver content required by the law at the time they were minted, even allowing for wear.

In studying Persian miniature paintings, he has found a two second test for authenticity. Mineral pigments were used. The green is not stable and acetic acid in it will tend to burn through the vellum. The test is simply to check for burn marks on the back.

Dr. Gordus has also been studying human hair for evidence of trace metal exposure in the environment. Fortunately the old fashioned hobby of making decorative hair wreaths and habit of saving locks of hair in lockets has provided him with valuable historical samples to compare with modern hair.

Hair, he finds, makes a good human fragment to work with. It often contains the highest concentrations of elements of any body tissue. Mercury content of human hair, for example, is 200 to 300 times that of human blood.

Hair magnified looks like logs with a pulpy center. It has scales and is similar to cuticle, he said.

He has 2,500 samples of historical hair (prior to 1930 and dating as far back as the late 1700's). He showed slides of various examples of hair art--rosettes, pins, crocheted watch chains and wreaths in various shapes with hair woven into floral shapes.

He had samples of mummies hair but found it too contaminated with preservatives.

He has 10,000 samples of modern hair from U-M students and from the United States Naval and Air Force Academies. The latter make a good sample because they come from all over, get haircuts the same day and live in a similar environment for several years. He has sets of three samples from some of the military students over the period of an academic year.

He has some preliminary findings but is trying to evaluate the effects of many variables before drawing more final conclusions.

Old hair was probably less frequently washed and may have absorbed more sweat. In the 1800's Godey's Lady's Book suggested not washing the hair and bathing wasn't much encouraged either then, he noted.

It appears we are getting more of some trace elements now--magnesium and vanadium, for example. But the older hair is higher in lead, arsenic, antimony, iron and iodine. Other elements including mercury are approximately the same.

His study of modern hair indicates that many things affect the trace element content of the hair, including environment, diet, shampooing and swimming habits.

The amount of several elements became more uniform in Academy students' hair after they lived in the same environment a while. Those who used dandruff-fighting shampoos containing selenium or zinc had higher amounts of those elements.

He found that hair of vegetarians has less mercury in it and the mercury content goes down noticeably after an individual has converted to a vegetarian diet. U-M students who swim in the University's brominated pool have 10 to

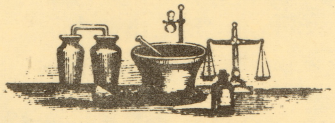
30 times as much bromine in their hair as those who don't. Those who shampoo infrequently have higher contents of many elements.

He has also discovered that some hair coloring products, particularly a gradual color change product, contain lead.

Interestingly, among Academy students, he found that those with the highest zinc contents had the highest marks and those with the highest lead contents had lowest marks.

While he has quite a large collection of hair samples now, he could use more if it is known whose hair it was, the region it was from and the period of time.

Dr. Gordus is analyzing hair samples for 38 trace elements. Besides other applications, hair analysis is also used in some criminal investigation. Dr. Gordus testified for the prosecution in pre-trial hearings of John Norman Collins.



NOT MUCH FUTURE IN IT

On March 17, 1860, the "San Francisco Bulletin" ran the first advertisements for Pony Express riders. The ads read as follows: "WANTED

Young, skinny, wiry fellows not over 18. Must be expert riders willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred. Wages $25 a week"

Reprinted from "Postal Record" magazine, March 1976.

SUNDAY MEETING PLANNED

The April WCHS meeting will be at 1:30 p.m. Sunday, April 25, in the lounge area of the Gandy Dancer Restaurant (formerly the Michigan Central Depot). Sam Breck of the Ann Arbor Train and Trolley Watchers will show slides of old railroad depots.

LIBERTY BELL STARTED OUT PROCLAIMING LOCAL NEWS TO PHILADELPHIANS, LATER PEALED FOR INDEPENDENCE

The famous Liberty Bell started out as a new province bell for the Pennsylvania state house in 1752. It was used to call the Pennsylvania Assembly together and to give all kinds of local messages--fires, deaths, executions.

Arlen R. Hellwarth, retired assistant dean of the U-M College of Engineering, retraced the bell's history at the February meeting of the Genealogy Section which fell on the traditional George Washington's Birthday.

The bell was cast at the Whitechapel foundry in London which had cast bells for Westminster Abbey in 1583 and 1598. The foundry is still in business and cast a commemorative issue of 2,400 table-size replicas of the Liberty Bell. After Dean Hellwarth got his replica, No. 789, he started to dig into its history. (The significance of 2,400 replicas is that there is one for each month of the United States' 200 year history.)

The one-ton bell cracked at the first sound of the clapper after it arrived in the U. S. It was recast twice of the same metal by American workmen before a satisfactory sound was obtained. It was then the largest bell in America. (The largest bells now in the U-M's Burton Tower weigh 12 tons, he noted.)

The bell's use for local messages in Philadelphia was so common that a code had been worked out whereby it could announce not only a death but whether male or female, he found.

It was rung for many important occasions including the accession to the throne of George III in 1761, but as early as 1753 it began to proclaim acts in defiance of the Crown. At that time it was rung when the Assembly voted to continue circulating its own money in Pennsylvania against the wishes of the crown.

It was muffled and tolled when ships bearing stamps for Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware came up the Delaware River Oct. 5, 1765. The day after fighting at Lexington and Concord, Mass., it called Philadelphians together to hear the news.

It did not ring for the first meeting of the Continental Congress which was probably somewhat on the "q-t", Dean Hellwarth said, and it did not ring on July 4, 1776. But on July 8, 1776, it rang for two hours along with local church bells preceding the public reading of the Declaration of Independence at noon that day.

It finally cracked so badly it could no longer be used. It has been on display for many years in Independence Hall, Philadelphia. For the Bicentennial, it will be displayed in a separate building on the grounds.

The inscription on the bell reads: "By Order of the Assembly of the Province of Pennsylvania for the State House in Philadelphia, Pass and Stowe, Philadelphia, MDCCLIII; Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof" (Leviticus 25:10).

SOUTHEAST REGION MEETING TO BE MAY 22 IN DEXTER

The third annual Southeast Region Historical Conference sponsored by the Historical Society of Michigan will be Saturday, May 22 at Dexter, Frank Wilhelme, director, announced.

The morning session will be in Dexter High School Library and the afternoon session at Webster Church. Lunch and a tour of the Dexter Museum are also planned.

WILLOW RUN BOMBER PLANT STUDY LAUNCHED AT WCC: INTERVIEWS BEING SOUGHT WITH PERSONS INVOLVED

Do you remember when the Bomber Plant was turning out an airplane an hour?

The rapid transition of a rural area traversed by a meandering creek named Willow Run to a large industrial complex employing 42,000 persons at its peak is the focus of a long-term study being initiated at Washtenaw Community College.

The study planned by Ms. Flavia Reps, a WCC American history teacher, is entitled "The Impact of World War II on Willow Run". It will be an oral history project involving taped interviews with persons in all phases of the development.

She thinks it is especially appropriate that WCC should do it because the college itself started in 1966 in the old Foster Elementary School in Willow Village which was built for workers' children.

She and her students want to interview not only production workers but others in all occupations involved in the development and operation of the Bomber Plant—design and construction of the plant, medical, security, ferry pilots and so on.

They also want to talk to those who lived in the immediate area before the plant was built and those employees who remained in the area after the war.

Ms. Reps feels that here is an exciting and significant bit of history at our doorstep. Many famous people came to the plant, she notes, including Presidents Roosevelt and Truman and Charles Lindbergh whose presence was supposed to be secret but was revealed by a Detroit newspaper.

She also wishes to locate former residents of Willow Lodge, a dormitory built for single workers at the plant. No dorm resident has been found in preliminary research to date.

Persons in the above categories who are willing to share their recollections or others who can suggest prospects may telephone Ms. Reps at WCC, 971-6300, Ext. 225.

She thinks the study may take up to five years. Besides its value to her students, she also hopes it will be of interest to the community and that WCC may become an archive for that phase of local history.

WESTERN WASHTENAW TOWNS PLAN GALA BICENTENNIAL

There are big plans afoot in western Washtenaw County to celebrate the Bicentennial.

A Western Washtenaw County Bicentennial Committee has been organized with Ronald (Rolly) Spaulding of Chelsea and Leonard Kitchen of Dexter as co-chairmen to coordinate celebrations planned in Chelsea, Dexter, Manchester and Saline.

Dexter will lead off, July 3-10, followed by Manchester July 15-24; Saline, July 30-August 7; and Chelsea, August 13-21. A 1923 Model T Ford touring car will be raffled off as a grand finale at the Chelsea Fair on August 28.

A history book is planned with sections about each of the participating communities. The communities have engaged the Rogers Co. of Fostoria, O., to assist.

CLIMBING YOUR FAMILY TREE? HELPFUL TALK PLANNED 28TH

"Climbing Your Family Tree" will be the topic at the Genealogy Section meeting at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, March 28, at the Senior Citizens Guild, 502 W. Huron St. Prof. Russell Bidlack, U-M Dean of Library Science, will be the speaker.

While the program is aimed at beginners, it will also be helpful to more advanced searchers, Chairman Ralph Muncy said.

CENTENNIAL CERTIFICATE APPLICATIONS OVER 12,000, 1850 CENSUS INDEX UNDERWAY

The Michigan Centennial Pioneer Family Certificate project seems to be booming and another aide to family history researchers is expected off the press in July.

Ralph Muncy, chairman of the WCHS Genealogy Section who represents that group on the Michigan Genealogical Council, reported that 12,000 applications for the certificates had been received at the time of the recent state council meeting.

The state council is also currently indexing the 1850 Michigan census, he said. It will be printed by Edwards Brothers in Ann Arbor. Pre-publication price is $18.

HSM ADDS ADVISORY COUNCIL, MRS. LEFSTAD IS MEMBER

The Historical Society of Michigan has a new statewide Advisory Council on State and Local History composed of 21 members representing local societies throughout the state.

Organized last month, it will next meet at the 102nd annual meeting of HSM, November 3-6 at Greenfield Village, Dearborn. Philip C. Kwiatkowski, director of the Museum of the Great Lakes at Bay City, is chairman. Mrs. Marie Lefstad of Whitmore Lake, representing the Dexter Area Historical Society, is a member.

BURTON COLLECTION, OTHERS PLAN CONFERENCE APRIL 9-10

The 18th Annual Conference on Local History, co-sponsored by several Detroit area historical agencies and societies, will be held April 9-10 at Wayne State University, Detroit Historical Museum and the Detroit Public Library. Registrations are due March 30 at the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, 5201 Woodward, Detroit, Mi. 48202. General registration is $1, meals extra.

COUNTY CALENDAR

Chelsea Area Historical Society—8 p.m. Monday, April 12, at Congregational Church. Don Wood, a village councilman, will discuss the possibility of designating historical areas in Chelsea.

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Dexter Historical Society—7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 25, in Library at Wylie School. Irene McNamara, a local antique dealer will show slides of Cooperstown, N.Y., and Bennington, Vt. as well as of her trip to Alaska last summer.

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Milan Historical Society—7:30 p.m. third Wednesday of month at Milan Community House.

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Saline Area Historical Society—8 p.m. Tuesday, April 20, in Blue Lounge at Saline High School. Polly Bender and a panel from WCHS will talk about the WCHS Genealogy Section and how it can help you trace your ancestral relationships and discover your personal involvement in history.

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Salem Historical Society—7:30 p.m. third Monday of month at township hall.

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Ypsilanti Historical Museum—Mrs. Esther Ensign of Ypsilanti will demonstrate decorating Easter eggs again this year at the museum. It will be from 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday, April 10. She plans to decorate with lace and metallic paint this year.

PLANTS NEEDED FOR NEXT FALL'S SALE

Lots of plants will be needed for the Katherine Groomes Memorial Plant Sale next fall to boost the WCHS museum fund.

The Board of Directors is appealing to all members who have house plants to slip them in the coming months and grow some extra plants for the sale.

The first sale early last September netted $325 thanks largely to the efforts of Lydia Muncy who devoted most of last summer to propagating plants from the late Katherine Groomes's collection.

HSM PUBLISHES 1744 MAP, DIRECTORY OF SOCIETIES

The Historical Society of Michigan has recently published a 1976 directory of historical societies and agencies in Michigan and a 1744 map of the Great Lakes.

The directory lists 220 local organizations with a combined membership of more than 35,000. The map was used to illustrate Explorer Charlevoix's Journal. The mapmaker, undeterred by the fact he had never seen the lakes, drew them complete with three imaginary islands in Lake Superior.

Both publications may be ordered from HSM, 2117 Washtenaw Ave., Ann Arbor, Mi., 48104. The directory is $2.08 for members and $4.16 for nonmembers. The map is $7.28. The map is the second in a Bicentennial series published in limited editions of 1,000 each.

Editor: Alice Ziegler, 663-8826
Keylining: Anna Thorsch and Dorothy Wood
Printing and Typesetting: Courtesy of Ann Arbor Federal Savings & Loan and Crury, Lacy, Inc.

Washtenaw County Historical Society Meeting

Thurs. March 25, 1976
8:00 P.M.
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